



Pakistan

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The country is an Islamic republic. Islam is the state religion, and the Constitution requires that laws be consistent with Islam. The Constitution states that "subject to law, public order and morality, every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice, and propagate his religion"; however, in practice the Government imposes limits on freedom of religion. Freedom of speech is constitutionally "subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam."

The Government took some steps to improve its treatment of religious minorities during the period covered by this report, but serious problems remained. Law enforcement personnel abused religious minorities in custody. Security forces and other government agencies did not adequately prevent or address societal abuse against minorities. Discriminatory legislation and the Government's failure to take action against societal forces hostile to those who practice a different religious belief fostered religious intolerance, acts of violence, and intimidation against religious minorities. Specific laws that discriminate against religious minorities include anti-Ahmadi and blasphemy laws that provide the death penalty for defiling Islam or its prophets. The Ahmadiyya community continued to face governmental and societal discrimination and legal bars to the practice of its religious beliefs. Members of other Islamic sects also claimed governmental discrimination.

Relations between religious communities were tense. Societal discrimination against religious minorities was widespread, and societal violence against such groups occurred. Societal actors, including terrorist and extremist groups and individuals, targeted religious congregations.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the period covered by this report, U.S. embassy officials closely monitored the treatment of religious minorities, worked to eliminate the teaching of religious intolerance, and encouraged the amendment of the blasphemy laws.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 310,527 square miles and a population of 170 million. Official figures on religious demography, based on the most recent census taken in 1998, showed that approximately 97 percent of the population was Muslim. Groups comprising 2 percent of the population or less include Hindus, Christians, and others, including Ahmadis. The majority of Muslims in the country are Sunni, with a Shi'a minority ranging between 10 to 20 percent. Parsis (Zoroastrians), Sikhs, and Buddhists each had approximately 20,000 adherents, while the Baha'i claimed 30,000. Some tribes in Baluchistan and North West Frontier Province (NWFP) practiced traditional animist religious beliefs.

Less than 0.5 percent of the population was silent on religious affiliation or claimed not to adhere to a particular religious group. Social pressure was such that few persons would claim no religious affiliation.

No data were available on active participation in formal religious services or rituals. Religious beliefs often played an important part in daily life. Most Muslims offered prayers on Friday, Islam's holy day. Many prayed daily. During the month of Ramadan, many less observant Muslims fasted and attended services. Approximately 70 percent of English-speaking Roman Catholics worshiped regularly; a much lower percentage of Urdu-speaking Catholics did so. Attendance at Hindu and Sikh religious services increased during festivals.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion. It also declares that adequate provisions shall be made for minorities to profess and practice their religious beliefs freely; however, in reality the Government imposes limits on freedom of religion, particularly on Ahmadis.

A 1974 constitutional amendment declares Ahmadis to be non-Muslim. Section 298(c), commonly referred to as the "anti-Ahmadi laws," prohibits Ahmadis from calling themselves Muslims, referring to their religious beliefs as Islam, preaching or propagating their religious belief, inviting others to accept Ahmadi teachings, or insulting the religious feelings of Muslims. The punishment for violation of the section is imprisonment for up to 3 years and a fine. Other religious communities were generally free to observe their religious obligations; however, religious minorities are legally restricted from public display of certain religious images and, due to discriminatory legislation and social pressure, are often afraid to profess their religious beliefs freely.

Freedom of speech is subject to "reasonable" restrictions in the interests of the "glory of Islam." The consequences for contravening the country's blasphemy laws are death for defiling Islam or its prophets; life imprisonment for defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Qur'an; and 10 years' imprisonment for insulting another's religious feelings. These laws are often used to settle personal scores as well as to intimidate vulnerable Muslims, sectarian opponents, and religious minorities. Under the Anti-Terrorist Act, any action, including speech, intended to incite religious hatred is punishable by up to 7 years of imprisonment. Under the act, bail is not to be granted if the judge has reasonable grounds to believe that the accused is guilty; however, the law is applied selectively.

Any speech or conduct that injures another's religious feelings, including those of minority religious groups, is prohibited and punishable by imprisonment. However, in cases where the religious feelings of a minority religious group were insulted, the blasphemy laws were rarely enforced and cases rarely brought to the legal system. A 2005 law requires that a senior police official investigate any blasphemy charge before a complaint is filed. According to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), this law was not uniformly enforced.

The Penal Code incorporates a number of Islamic law (Shari'a) provisions. The judicial system encompasses several different court systems with overlapping and sometimes competing jurisdictions that reflect differences in civil, criminal, and Islamic jurisprudence. The Federal Shari'a Court and the Shari'a bench of the Supreme Court serve as appellate courts for certain convictions in criminal court under the Hudood Ordinances; judges and attorneys in these courts must be Muslim. The federal Shari'a court may overturn any legislation judged to be inconsistent with the tenets of Islam. In March 2005, however, the Supreme Court Chief Justice ruled that the Federal Shari'a Court had no jurisdiction to review a decision by a provincial high court even if the Federal Shari'a Court should have had initial appellate jurisdiction.

Criminal law allows offenders to offer monetary restitution to victims and allows victims to carry out physical retribution rather than seek punishment through the court system. The law exists under the title "Qisaas and Diyat" to provide money to the victim of the crime ("eye for an eye"). However, this tribal law is rarely implemented except in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Religious minorities claimed that minority offenders faced far higher, and minority victims received far lower, amounts of monetary restitution than did Muslims.

In December 2006 President Musharraf signed into law the Women's Protection Bill of 2006, which amended the Hudood Ordinance and moved cases of rape and adultery to secular rather than Shari'a courts. Previously, the Hudood Ordinance, which criminalizes rape, extramarital sex, property crimes, alcohol, and gambling, often relied on harsh and discriminatory interpretations of Qur'anic standards of evidence and punishment that applied equally to Muslims and non-Muslims. If Qur'anic standards are used, Muslim and non-Muslim and male and female testimony carry different weight. President Musharraf also ordered the release of all women imprisoned under the Hudood Ordinance. Approximately 2,500 women have been released. Many were unable to return to their homes because of social ostracism. A few others remained in custody, and most were housed in Daarul Amaans (government-run group homes). The women who were arrested under the Hudood Ordinance on charges of fornication, adultery, and possession of liquor now have their cases heard under the Women's Protection Bill.

The Government designates religious affiliation on passports and requests religious information in national identity card applications. Citizens must have a national identity card to vote. Those wishing to be listed as a Muslim must swear to believe that Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet and denounce the Ahmadiyya Movement's founder as a false prophet and his followers as non-Muslims, a provision designed to discriminate against Ahmadis. Before the 2002 general elections, President Musharraf abolished the requirement to take this oath, but he later reversed his decision, resulting in an election boycott by the Ahmadiyya community. Initial voter registration no longer requires such an oath, but the Election Commission claimed that any Muslim registrant whose religious beliefs were challenged by the public would have to take the oath. As a result, Ahmadis continued to boycott the elections. No new policies based on religion were made for the February 2008 elections.

The Constitution provides for the "freedom to manage religious institutions." In principle, the Government does not restrict organized religious groups from establishing places of worship and training members of the clergy. In practice, however, religious minorities suffered from restrictions on this right. The Government, at the district level, consistently refused to grant permission to construct non-Muslim places of worship, especially to the Ahmadiyya and Baha'i communities, citing the need to maintain public order. There is no official restriction on the construction of Ahmadiyya places of worship; however, Ahmadis are forbidden from calling them mosques. District governments often refuse to grant Ahmadis permission to hold events publicly, therefore they hold their meetings in members' homes. The Government can shut down these gatherings if neighbors report hearing the recitation of Qur'anic verses.

The Government provides funding for construction and maintenance of mosques and for Islamic clergy. The provincial and federal governments have legal responsibility for certain religious properties belonging to minority communities that were abandoned during partition. Minority communities claimed the Government did not spend adequate funds on their protection and upkeep. The Government collected a 2.5 percent tax (zakaat) on all Sunni Muslims, which was distributed to Sunni mosques, madrassahs, and charities. No similar requirement was imposed on other religious groups.

Government policies do not afford equal protection to members of majority and minority religious groups. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, which is mandated to safeguard religious freedom, claims it spends 30 percent of its annual budget to assist indigent minorities, to repair minority places of worship, establish minority-run small development schemes, and celebrate minority festivals. However, religious minorities questioned these figures, observing that localities and villages housing minority citizens go without basic civic amenities. The Ministry has on its masthead a Qur'anic verse: "Islam is the only religion acceptable to God."

The Government observes Islamic holy days as national holidays.

The Constitution safeguards "educational institutions with respect to religion." No student can be forced to receive religious instruction or participate in religious worship other than his or her own. The denial of religious instruction for students of any religious community or denomination is also prohibited.

Islamiyyat (Islamic studies) is compulsory for all Muslim students in state-run schools. Although students of other religious groups are not legally required to study Islam, they are not provided with parallel studies in their own religious beliefs. In some schools non-Muslim students may study Akhlaqiyyat, or Ethics.

The Constitution specifically prohibits discriminatory admission to any governmental educational institution solely based on religious affiliation. Government officials stated that the only factors affecting admission to governmental educational institutions were students' grades and home provinces; however, students must declare their religious affiliation on application forms. This declaration is also true for private educational institutions, including universities. Muslim students must declare in writing that they believe that Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet, a measure that singles out Ahmadis. Non-Muslims must have their religious affiliation verified by the head of their local religious community.

Parents are free to send children to religious schools, at their expense, and many did. Private schools are free to teach or not teach religious studies as they choose.

Islamic schools known as madrassahs are traditional institutions for Muslims seeking a purely religious

education. In recent years many madrassahs have taught extremist doctrine in support of terrorism. In many rural communities, they are the only form of education available. In an attempt to curb the spread of extremism, the 2002 Madrassah Registration Ordinance required all madrassahs to register with one of the five independent boards (wafaqs), cease accepting foreign financing, and accept foreign students only with the consent of their government. According to the Interior Ministry, 95 percent of foreign madrassah students had departed by President Musharraf's July 2005 deadline. According to the Religious Affairs Ministry, approximately 11,000 of an estimated 13,000 to 15,000 madrassahs had registered by the end of the reporting period. This statistic was disputed by many civil society organizations and education experts.

In December 2005 President Musharraf laid out the framework for cooperative registration of madrassahs with the Government, including provision of financial and educational data and a prohibition on the teaching of sectarian or religious hatred and violence. The Government and the independent madrassah boards agreed to a phased introduction of secular subjects, including math, English, and science, at all madrassahs. The reform initially stalled due to political upheaval and jurisdictional battles within the previous government. The newly elected coalition government listed madrassah reform as a priority.

A March 2007 report indicated that unregulated, extremist madrassahs in Karachi continued to thrive in the sprawling city with a large population of young, unemployed men. International Crisis Group reported that after 5 years of trying to reform madrassahs, the Government's program had not fully succeeded, and that extremist groups were operating mosques and madrassahs in the open in Karachi and elsewhere, due to lack of consistent regulation. Despite the fact that reforms were stalled, the majority of the country's madrassahs have been registered, foreign students are now required to obtain a no-objection certificate before attending madrassah classes, and all madrassahs are required to report their finances. Additionally, the new government announced that there would be a uniform curriculum in the madrassahs, with a more secular tone to be introduced.

All wafaqs mandated the elimination of teaching that promoted religious or sectarian intolerance and terrorist or extremist recruitment at madrassahs. Inspectors mandated that affiliated madrassahs supplement religious studies with secular subjects, including English, math, and science. Wafaqs also restricted foreign private funding of madrassahs. Examination concerns remained under active discussion with the Government. Some unregistered and Deobandi-controlled madrassahs in the FATA, Karachi, and northern Baluchistan continued to teach extremism. Similarly, the Dawa schools run by Jamat-ud-Dawa continued such teaching and recruitment for Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, a designated foreign terrorist organization.

The Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA)-led provincial government, a coalition of six conservative parties that ruled in the NWFP until November 2007, continued to pass directives and legislation in accordance with conservative Islamic views. If implemented, many of these initiatives would impose Shari'a on all citizens, regardless of religious affiliation. Existing laws include antiobscenity measures under which advertising has been torn down, stores fined for selling certain western recordings, a complete ban on alcohol, and a requirement for civil servants to pray five times daily.

The Government does not restrict religious publishing in general; however, the sale of Ahmadi religious literature is banned. The law prohibits publishing any criticism of Islam or its prophets or insults to another's religious beliefs.

In February 2008, upon the announcement of the reprinting of the Danish cartoons, religious leaders called for nationwide protests and for delivery of speeches at Friday sermons against the cartoons. Some media also condemned the cartoon reprint and the release of the film "Fitna," produced by a member of the Dutch Parliament, which they believed ridiculed the Prophet Muhammad. Sporadic protests over the controversial film and cartoon reprint took place, but much less than during the original release of the cartoon. On June 2, 2008, an attack on the Danish Embassy in Islamabad killed 8 persons and injured 24. The attackers claimed the act was in relation to the cartoon reprinting.

The Government, at its most senior levels, continued to call for interfaith dialogue and sectarian harmony as part of its program to promote enlightened moderation. The Religious Affairs Ministry and the Council on Islamic Ideology, a constitutionally mandated government body, continued to sponsor interfaith and intersectoral workshops and meetings.

During the reporting period, the Government held three interfaith conferences, one each in Lahore, Peshawar, and Karachi. The Government also supported Allama Inayat Ali Shakir's organization, Tehrik-e-Akhuwat-e-Islami (Movement for the Brotherhood of Islam), in various interfaith meetings in Islamabad and Lahore.

The primary responsibility of the Religious Affairs Ministry is to organize participation in the Hajj and other Islamic religious pilgrimages and to distribute zakaat.

The Government did not prohibit, restrict, or punish parents for raising children in accordance with religious teachings and practices of their choice, nor did it take steps to prevent parents from teaching their children religious instruction in the privacy of the home.

There are no legal requirements for an individual to practice or affiliate nominally with a religious group. However, the Constitution requires that the president and prime minister be Muslims. All senior officials, including members of parliament, must swear an oath to protect the country's Islamic identity. Government employees are not prohibited from displaying or practicing any elements of their religious beliefs.

Missionaries (except Ahmadis) operate in the country and can proselytize, as long as there is no preaching against Islam and the missionaries acknowledge they are not Muslim. Missionaries are required to have specific visas valid from 2 to 5 years and are allowed one entry into the country per year. Only "replacement" visas for those taking the place of departing missionaries were available, and long delays and bureaucratic problems were frequent.

In accordance with the Anti-Terrorist Act, the Government banned the activities of and membership in several religious extremist and terrorist groups. The Anti-Terrorist Act allows the Government to use special streamlined courts to try violent crimes, terrorist activities, acts or speech designed to foment religious hatred, and crimes against the state; however, many of the groups that the Government banned remained active.

The Government does not recognize either civil or common law marriage. Marriages are performed and registered according to one's religious group. The marriages of non-Muslim men remain legal upon conversion to Islam. However, if a non-Muslim female converts to Islam and her marriage was performed according to her previous religious beliefs, the marriage is considered dissolved. Children born to Hindu or Christian women who convert to Islam after marriage are considered illegitimate unless their husbands also convert. Children of non-Muslim men who convert are considered legitimate. A Muslim man can marry a woman "of the Book" (Jew or Christian) but cannot marry a woman of any other religious group unless she converts to Islam, Judaism, or Christianity. Muslim women may only marry Muslim men. The children of a Muslim man and a Muslim woman who both convert to another religious group are considered illegitimate and can be seized by the Government. In effect, the Government recognizes a marriage if both bride and groom are of the same religious group, irrespective of the sect, or if the groom is Muslim and bride is "of the Book." Children born to these couples are considered legitimate. If the bride is Muslim and groom is not, they are not considered married and their children are illegitimate. Since Muslim males are not allowed to convert to any other religious group, the only way the marriage can be legitimated and the children made eligible for inheritance is if the groom converts to Islam.

The Government did not restrict the formation of political parties based on a particular religious group, religious belief, or interpretation of religious doctrine. The Government monitored the activities of various Islamist parties and affiliated clergy due to prior links to terrorist and extremist organizations. There are reserved seats for religious minority members in both the national and provincial assemblies. Such seats are allocated to the political parties on a proportional basis determined by their overall representation in the assembly. As a result of the February 2008 general elections, the National Assembly has ten members of minority religious groups, and minorities are represented in most tiers of the local government systems, including the union councils, tehsil councils, and district councils. Minorities were also elected to the provincial assemblies: three non-Muslims in NWFP, eight in Punjab, eight in Sindh, and three in Baluchistan.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally enforced existing legal restrictions on religious freedom.

Since 1983 Ahmadis have been prohibited from holding public conferences or gatherings, and been denied permission to hold their annual conference. Ahmadis were banned from preaching and were prohibited from traveling to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj or other religious pilgrimages. Ahmadiyya publications were banned from public sale, but they published religious literature in large quantities for a limited circulation.

While the Constitution guarantees the right to establish places of worship and train clergy, in practice Ahmadis suffered from restrictions on this right. According to press reports, authorities continued to conduct surveillance on Ahmadis and their institutions. Several Ahmadiyya mosques reportedly were closed; others reportedly were desecrated or had their construction stopped.

Public pressure routinely prevented courts from protecting minority rights. These same pressures forced justices to take strong action against any perceived offense to Sunni orthodoxy. Discrimination against religious minorities was rarely placed before the judiciary. According to several NGOs, cases against Christians and Ahmadis continued to grow during the reporting period; however, the judiciary, even at the lower levels, acted in a more judicious manner in dealing with these cases as compared with previous reporting periods. NGOs reported that cases against both the local Christian and Hindu communities continued but to a lesser degree, and that social discrimination remains at high levels. There was generally a long period between filing the case and the first court appearance. Lower courts were frequently intimidated, delayed decisions, and refused bail for fear of reprisal from extremist elements. Bail in blasphemy cases was usually denied by original trial courts, arguing that since defendants faced the death penalty, they were likely to flee. Many defendants appealed the denial of bail, but bail was often not granted in advance of the trial.

Additionally, the new Government announced that there would be a uniform curriculum in the madrassahs, with a more secular tone to be introduced.

In contrast to previous reporting periods, there were no reports of district governments restricting the distribution and display of certain religious images, such as the "Holy Trinity" and Jesus Christ. Such images were openly displayed and sold in Christian communities.

Religious belief or specific adherence to a religious group was not required for membership in the ruling party or the moderate opposition parties. All political parties, except for religious parties, had a separate minority wing.

Foreign books must pass government censors before being reprinted. Books and magazines may be imported freely but are subject to censorship for objectionable sexual or religious content.

The Government sometimes funded and facilitated Hajj travel but had no similar program for pilgrimages by religious minorities. Due to the passport requirement to list religious affiliation and denounce the Ahmadi prophet, Ahmadis were restricted from going on the Hajj, because they were unable to declare themselves as Muslim. In addition, given the Government's lack of recognition of Israel, religious believers, regardless of religious affiliation, were unable to travel to Israel on pilgrimage. This especially affected Baha'is, since the Baha'i World Centre, the spiritual and administrative heart of the Baha'i community, is located in northern Israel.

Shi'a and other religious minorities contended that the Government persistently discriminated against members of their communities in hiring for the civil service and in admissions to government institutions of higher learning.

Promotions for all minority groups appeared limited within the civil service. These problems were particularly acute for Ahmadis, who contended that a "glass ceiling" prevented them from being promoted to senior positions and that certain government departments refused to hire or retain qualified Ahmadis. The Government discriminated against some groups, such as Ahl-e-Hadith and Barelvi, when hiring clergy for government mosques and faculty members for Islamic government colleges.

Members of minority religious groups volunteered for military service in small numbers, and there were no official obstacles to their advancement; however, in practice non-Muslims rarely rose above the rank of colonel and were not assigned to politically sensitive positions. A chaplaincy corps provided services for Muslim

soldiers, but no similar services were available for religious minorities. In September 2007 the Government of Punjab commissioned a Sikh traffic warden in Lahore, and he was the first non-Muslim recruit in the Punjab police department.

The public school curriculum included derogatory remarks in textbooks against minority religious groups, particularly Hindus and Jews, and the teaching of religious intolerance was widespread. The Government continued to modernize curriculum to eliminate such teachings and remove Islamic overtones from secular subjects. New textbooks were being published, and the process was underway. Instead of a mandatory Islamic studies class, in 2006 the Education Minister supported offering an ethics class as an alternative. In contrast to previous reporting periods, there were no reports of discrimination against Ahmadis and Christians when they applied for entry to universities and medical schools.

Officials used bureaucratic demands and bribes to delay religious groups trying to build houses of worship or obtain land. While Ahmadis were prevented from building houses of worship, Sunni Muslim groups built mosques and shrines without government permission, at times in violation of zoning ordinances and upon government-owned lands. According to the press reports in December 2007, locals of Rasool Nagar protested against the district government for demolishing a newly constructed two-room Sunni mosque. The mosque attendees claimed that they were granted permission from the district; however, district administrators deny granting permission.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Police reportedly tortured and mistreated those in custody, and at times, engaged in extrajudicial killings. It was usually impossible to ascertain whether adherence to particular religious beliefs was a factor in cases in which religious minorities were victims; however, both Christian and Ahmadiyya communities claimed their members were more likely to be abused. Non-Muslim prisoners generally were accorded poorer facilities than Muslim inmates, including a lack of access to spiritual resources. Conversion to other minority religious groups generally took place in secret to avoid a societal backlash.

Ahmadiyya leaders claimed the Government used regular sections of the Penal Code against their members for religious reasons. Authorities often accused converts to the Ahmadiyya community of blasphemy, violations of the anti-Ahmadi laws, or other crimes. The Government used anti-Ahmadi laws to target and harass Ahmadis. The vague wording of the provision that forbids Ahmadis from directly or indirectly identifying themselves as Muslims enabled officials to bring charges against Ahmadis for using the standard Muslim greeting and for naming their children Muhammad. According to the Islamabad-based Jamaat-e-Ahmadiya, the Ahmadiyya community claimed that during the period covered by this report, 45 Ahmadis faced criminal charges under religious laws or because of their religious beliefs: 7 under the blasphemy laws, 23 under Ahmadi-specific laws, and 15 under other laws but motivated by their adherence to Ahmadiyya religious beliefs.

At the end of the reporting period, four Ahmadis were arrested on blasphemy charges; one was in prison, and three others were out on bail. The Ahmadiyya community claimed these were falsely brought due to their religious beliefs. Fifteen more criminal cases, ranging from killings to destruction of property, were filed against prominent members of the Ahmadiyya community during the reporting period. The cases remained unprosecuted, and the accused were allowed to post bail.

In June 2008 an antiterrorism court at Gujranwala, Punjab, acquitted five persons arrested for the murder of eight Ahmadis of Mandi Bahauddin District. The killings took place in October 2005 when a group attacked Ahmadi worshippers during the morning congregational prayers at their mosque, injuring 20 persons and killing 8.

On March 6, 2008, police arrested 80-year-old Ahmadi Altaf Husain in Kabeerwala for desecrating the Qur'an. According to police, a student saw Husain rip pages out of the Qur'an and throw them on the ground. Members of the Ahmadiyya community stated that Husain was just reading the power meter outside his home when the student warned him that he was stepping on a page of the Qur'an. Police arrived and arrested Husain.

In January 2008 authorities arrested an Ahmadi in Wazirabad, Punjab, on charges of distributing Ahmadi-related pamphlets. He was granted bail in March 2008 and forced to leave the area after receiving numerous death threats.

In January 2008 police charged an Ahmadiyya businessman, Manzur Ahmed, with destroying pages that included religious inscriptions. At the end of the reporting period, he remained behind bars on destruction of holy material.

In September 2007 police accused Mumtaz Ali, an Ahmadi, of subscribing, receiving, and subsequently distributing the newsletter of the local Ahmadiyya community. He was taken in police custody for 10 days and released because of his old age. In October Ali died, but the police refused to drop the charges and threatened the doctor's family with imprisonment if the household continued to receive the newsletter.

In November 2007 three Ahmadis were arrested in Sargodha, Punjab, on charges of proselytizing when they invited other locals to their places of worship. They were given bail in mid-February 2008.

In December 2007 Larkana police arrested 21 Ahmadis on charges of gathering and worshipping like Muslims after neighbors claimed to police that they heard Islamic verses coming from the home of one of the members. At the end of the reporting period, three of the 21 remained in prison.

In 2007 authorities released Mian Mohammed Yar, the president of the local Ahmadiyya community in the Okara District of the Punjab, who was arrested in August 2006 under the anti-Ahmadi laws on the charge of preaching.

Authorities routinely used the blasphemy laws to harass religious minorities and vulnerable Muslims and to settle personal scores or business rivalries. Authorities detained and convicted individuals on spurious charges. Judges and magistrates, seeking to avoid a confrontation with or violence from extremists, often continued trials indefinitely.

During the reporting period, authorities arrested at least 25 Ahmadis, 11 Christians, and 17 Muslims on blasphemy charges. Many remained in prison at the end of the reporting period. The National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) stated "Generally we do not request bail because of security. Blasphemy suspects are often safest in prison under police protection."

On June 18, 2008, Mohammad Shafeeq was sentenced to death for blasphemy after he allegedly defiled the Qur'an and used derogatory language to refer to the Prophet Mohammad. Shafeeq was arrested in 2006, on the complaint of local religious leaders, in a village near Sialkot where the trial was held.

In June 2008 four Ahmadis were arrested and charged for blasphemy in Kotri. The arrests were made after a dispute occurred over construction of an Ahmadiyya prayer center and protests from mullas of Tahafuz Khatame Nabuwwat.

According to *Compass Direct News*, in May 2008 police arrested Robin Sardar, a Christian, after a mob attacked his home in Punjab because he had allegedly committed blasphemy. Sardar, who denied the charges, was held in Punjab's Gujranwala Central Jail; his wife and six children abandoned their home for fear of new attacks. According to reports, local Islamist groups have threatened to kill Sardar if he is acquitted.

In May 2008 Muslims filed a blasphemy case against Pastor Frank John when he was conducting a religious convention at Green Town, Christian Colony in Lahore. The dispute evolved from an argument between the pastor and some Muslims of the locality. When Christians gathered for the convention, local Muslims stated that no one would be allowed to use the speakers for prayers. The police filed a first information report (FIR) against the pastor on May 3, 2008. The Muslims then pressured the police to register a case against the entire Christian community, but the police refused to do so and asked them to file an application instead. An application was given to police, but a formal case was not registered against the whole community.

On April 9, 2008, in the Karachi Korangi Industrial Area, employees beat to death Jagdesh Kumar, a Hindu employee, after he allegedly made blasphemous comments against Islam. Factory guards attempted to save Jagdesh by taking him into protective custody, and a small contingency of police was called. However, the Karachi police superintendent later suspended these police officers after it was determined that they did not take the appropriate actions to save the employee's life.

In January 2008 a Sargodha resident was beaten by locals for allegedly arguing against Islam and for Christianity. He sustained severe injuries, but the matter was mediated without any police actions.

According to a minority rights NGO, Ashraf Masih, a Christian, was suspended from his job in Gujranwala in November 2007 for allegedly refusing to separate pages that contained Islamic religious inscriptions from those that did not while clearing out a municipal office. He was later restored in March 2008, but at a lower grade.

According to the NCJP, Abdul Malik, a resident of Burewala, was accused of making derogatory remarks against the Prophet Mohammad in September 2007. Several protests were staged throughout Lahore by various Islamic organizations and demanded that Malik should be arrested and punished for the alleged blasphemy. By the end of the reporting period, a case had been registered against Malik, but he had not been arrested.

In May 2007 authorities arrested 84-year-old Christian Walter Fazal Khan for blasphemy. He was accused of allegedly burning a Qur'an. The family claimed he was a victim of Muslim businessmen who wanted to buy land Khan was selling for much lower than the asking price. After his arrest, local religious leaders forced Khan's 86-year-old wife to convert to Islam. In June 2007 Khan's wife died and in July Khan was released.

In April 2007 a mob tortured a Catholic man, Sattar Masih, before police arrived and arrested him for allegedly writing blasphemous words against the Prophet Muhammad. Police reportedly tortured him again in prison to obtain a confession. At the end of the reporting period, Masih remained in prison.

In April 2007 officials accused Salamat Masih, a Christian in Toba Tek Singh, and four members of his family of desecrating papers bearing the Prophet Muhammad's name. Officials arrested Salamat, but the other four remained in hiding, including Salamat's 11-year-old son. According to the NCJP, Masih remained in prison; he has not applied for bail, and his family's location is unknown.

In March 2007 a mob of Muslims attacked Amanat Masih, a Christian, for allegedly desecrating the Qur'an. Police arrested Masih for blasphemy. At the end of the reporting period, he remained in prison.

In November 2006 courts convicted Catholics James Masih and Buta Masih of blasphemy for allegedly burning a Qur'an and sentenced them to 10 years in prison. Both remained in prison, with an appeal pending in the Lahore High Court.

In October 2006 police arrested Ahmadi Mohammed Tariq and charged him under blasphemy laws for allegedly tearing off anti-Ahmadiyya stickers inside a bus. Police released him on bail in December 2006, and at the end of the reporting period, he was awaiting trial.

In September 2006 police released on bail two Ahmadiyya journalists working for an Ahmadiyya publication, *Al Fazl*, whom they had charged under blasphemy laws. Three others from *Al Fazl*, an editor, a publisher, and a printer, remained in confinement awaiting court proceedings on the same charges. According to Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya, all were released but were given strict warnings by the police to stop publishing. Reports also indicated that strong pressure was placed on the provincial and district governments by many religious leaders to shut down the publication activities of all Punjabi Ahmadis following this case.

In September 2006 in two separate incidents, courts based custody decisions on allegations that the Christian mothers would convert their children to Christianity, and so gave custody of the children to their Muslim fathers. The fathers, however, were suspected of kidnapping their children from the ex-wives. In the first case, a Muslim man was given custody of his 12-year-old daughter Molly because his ex-wife had reconverted to Christianity. Sajad Ahmed Rana gained custody of Molly after telling courts in Lahore that Molly's mother was living with a man in Scotland she was not married to and was not raising Molly in an Islamic home. Molly disappeared from her school in Scotland and reappeared several days later with her father in Lahore. Molly reportedly continued to live with her father in Lahore, and the case was dropped by the mother, still in Scotland. The court gave her the right to visit Molly at any time.

In the second case, a Muslim man was arrested for kidnapping two children from his ex-wife in 2004. He had

kidnapped them during supervised visitation because he was afraid his ex-wife would convert the children to Christianity.

In July 2006 courts released on bail Hafiz Afzal Rehman and Hiji Latif, who had been held in a Lahore prison on blasphemy charges since 2004. Their trials were pending, and both men were still on bail with no hearings set at the end of this reporting period.

In September 2005 in Lahore, Younis Masih, a Christian, confronted a Muslim cleric about loud music accompanying a nighttime religious ceremony. During the course of their altercation, Masih allegedly insulted the Prophet Muhammad. Police arrested Masih on charges of blasphemy, and shortly thereafter, a mob attacked the Christian community. Masih was sentenced to death by the district court in Lahore on May 30, 2007. The case was on appeal at the end of the reporting period, and Masih's attorney, Pervez Aslam Chaudhry, was receiving threats, ordering him to stop pursuing the appeals for his client's case.

There was no action expected in the September 2005 case in which NWFP police arrested a Hindu couple on charges of defiling the Qur'an. The courts released them on bail after each had converted to Islam before officials.

According to the Commission for Peace and Human Development, two clerics in Gujranwala, Ahmad Saeed Khan Multani and Muhammad Manzoor Moavia, were accused by the prayer leader of a local mosque of writing and publishing a book that contained blasphemies against Islamic personages. Consequently, the police arrested the two clerics, and the book was banned.

Minority communities charged the Government was complicit in seizures of their property by Muslims and that the government policy of dismantling illegal slum settlements disproportionately targeted minority communities. These groups also accused the Government of inaction in cases of attacks by extremist groups on places of worship belonging to minority groups.

In the spring of 2007, members of the Ahmadiyya community purchased 6 acres of land outside Lahore to expand a preexisting cemetery. Local clerics denounced the purchase and held demonstrations against the Ahmadiyya community. Police sided with the clerics, and local authorities claimed the construction of a wall on the land would be used to form a "center of apostasy." When the Ahmadis refused to remove the wall, five buses of policemen arrived and destroyed it in the middle of the night. Officials admitted the action was taken under pressure of local clerics.

In October 2006 police stopped construction of a new Ahmadiyya school in Sialkot district. Mullahs reportedly then destroyed the partially constructed building. At the end of the reporting period, the school had yet to be constructed.

In June 2008 a delegation of Korean Buddhists, headed by senior monk Jeon Woon Deok, urged the Government to adopt measures for protecting and restoring a Buddha site in Takhtbhai, NWFP.

There were reports that in July 2007 the Government detained a Uyghur Muslim Chinese national in Islamabad and forcibly returned him to China at the request of the Government of China. There were credible reports that the Government of China tortured and, in some cases, executed Uyghurs who had been forcibly returned.

The Government did not subject individuals to forced labor or enslavement based on religious beliefs; however, minority community leaders charged that the Government failed to take adequate action to prevent bonded labor in both the brickmaking and agricultural sectors. Christians and Hindus were disproportionately victims of this practice.

Forced Religious Conversion

Forced and coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam occurred at the hands of societal actors. Religious minorities claimed that government actions to stem the problem were inadequate. Representatives of the Hindu community in Sindh claim the forced conversion (usually related to familial debts) of 15 to 20

Hindu families per year. Human rights groups highlighted the increased phenomenon of Hindu girls, particularly in Karachi and other parts of Sindh, being kidnapped from their families by local actors, forced to convert to Islam, and forced to marry their kidnappers. The kidnappers then produce a document claiming the girl is a convert and a willing bride.

In September 2007 Tahira Salamat, a Christian girl from Multan, was abducted by Muhammad Ramzan and forced to convert to Islam and then marry him. She was able to escape Ramzan and was reunited with her family in February 2008. Her family filed a case against Ramzan in the Lahore High Court, and the case was under process at the end of the reporting period.

According to press reports, two Christian girls, aged 16 and 11, were forcibly converted to Islam and married to Muslim men after they went missing in August 2007. The families of the two girls filed complaints with the local Faisalabad police, but their alleged abductors produced false marriage certificates with false ages for the girls. Because the police did not register a case against the men, the local Human Rights Commission of Pakistan chapter, in cooperation with local Christian lawyers, took action and was able to get the girls back to their families. By the end of the reporting period, the police had not taken any action against the abductors.

There were no reports of forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

There were several incidents involving the abuse of religious groups carried out by individuals or organizations designated as terrorist organizations by the U.S. Secretary of State under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act and by armed sectarian extremist groups with strong links to such organizations.

Nationwide, sectarian violence remained unchanged during the period covered by this report.

Targeted assassinations of clergy remained a key tactic of several groups, including the banned sectarian organization Sipah-i-Sahaba (SSP), the terrorist organization Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ), and the sectarian organizations Sunni Tehrike (ST) and Sipah-i-Mohammad Pakistan (SMP). SSP and LJ targeted both Shi'a and Barelvis, whereas ST and SMP targeted Deobandis.

On June 21, 2008, unidentified militants kidnapped during prayer 25 to 32 Christian men and boys in Peshawar and released them on June 22. One Muslim also kidnapped with the group was still missing. The Muslim man had rented a building, which was formerly a madrassah, to the Christians. According to press reports, the militants were affiliated with Lashkar-e-Islam (LI), a militant group with ties to terrorist organizations. The Muslim man was later released after he promised to pray five times a day, grow a beard, and never commit an un-Islamic act.

On May 3, 2008, LI militants killed a man, Mukarram, for not offering Asr prayers and standing outside a mosque in the Sarband Police Station jurisdiction in the NWFP. When Mukarram told the militants that it was his personal matter, the LI men shot him.

On May 1, 2008, a suicide bomber detonated explosives inside a mosque in Khyber's Bara tehsil, injuring at least 17 persons, 3 of them seriously. The target of the attack was Hajji Namdar, the leader of Khyber agency's militant/criminal organizations. Namdar survived the attack.

On March 7, 2008, Karachi police arrested three militants, not including the alleged ringleader, who had in 2002 reportedly killed seven members of the Institute of Peace and Justice, one of the country's oldest Christian-based charities.

On January 27, 2008, a suicide bomber detonated explosives inside a Shi'a mosque in Peshawar's old city, killing at least 12 persons.

On January 17, 2008, a teen suicide bomber detonated himself in a Shi'a place of worship, the Imam Bargah, during a religious ceremony. The bomber unsuccessfully tried to shoot the speaker prior to the explosion, but ten persons were killed in the event.

On December 21, 2007, a suicide bomber attacked a gathering, during Eid prayers, killing more than 50 persons and injuring approximately 100 in Charsadda.

On November 16, 2007, three Christians were killed in "cross firing" between the military and militants. The Christians, identified as Waheed, Gulzar, and Raja, were returning from work as office and home cleaners in the Kabler area when they were shot on the road to Mingora. The funerals of the three men were held on November 18, 2007, but local Christians stated no priest or pastor was able to attend the funerals because roads into the area were blocked. No clergy resided in the valley to serve the Christian community of approximately 70 families.

According to *Compass Direct News*, in October 2007 Islamic militants threatened to bomb a Christian family for refusing to convert to Islam in NWFP. The Christian community reported increasing pressure to conform to Shari'a. Christians began wearing Islamic attire in order to blend in, and men were being forced to grow beards.

In September 2007 militants made three unsuccessful attempts to destroy a rock engraved with Buddha's image in Buthgarh. The blasts only partially damaged the historic Buddhist monument.

On September 15, 2007, Maulana Hassan Jan, a revered Deobandi scholar, prayer leader, and former member of the National Assembly from the NWFP, was killed after he made several public statements condemning suicide attacks in the name of Islam. Although his killers were not captured, it is widely accepted that his death was at the hands of Shi'a militants.

On July 19, 2007, a suicide bomber entered an army cantonment and blew up the mosque, killing at least 19 persons and injuring at least 15 in Kohat.

Both LJ and SSP continued attacks on houses of worship and religious gatherings during the period covered by this report.

Al-Qa'ida-linked organizations maintained networks in the country, and its supporters periodically issued anti-Semitic statements.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government took steps to bolster religious freedom during the period covered by this report. In November 2007 the Government supported the Kawan-e-Aman, an interfaith harmony project that examined societal discrimination and random violence targeting religious minorities, particularly Christians. Additionally, throughout the reporting period the Government continued its efforts to end the Sunni/Shi'a violence in Kurram Agency through negotiations and peace talks.

In April 2008 the country signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, reflecting the renewed commitment of the democratic government to promote human rights, including religious freedom.

The Government continued to include human rights awareness as part of its police training program.

The World Council of Religions in Islamabad, assisted by leaders from Islamic, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Parsi communities and backed by President Musharraf, continued to organize interfaith dialogue sessions throughout the country. The Religious Affairs Ministry and the Islamic Ideology Council continued to organize smaller intersectorian and interfaith meetings and dialogue sessions. Following these meetings, Deobandi and Jamaat-e-Islami religious and political leaders significantly toned down anti-Christian and anti-Hindu rhetoric.

According to *Compass Direct News*, in September 2007 a judge cleared Christian 18-year-old Shahid Masih of charges that he had ripped up pages from a *tafseer*, a book explaining Qur'anic verses. The judge acquitted Masih after prosecution witnesses changed their original testimonies.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Relations between the country's religious communities remained tense. Violence against religious minorities and between Muslim sects continued. Most believed that a small minority was responsible for attacks; however, discriminatory laws and the teaching of religious intolerance created a permissive environment for attacks. Police often refused to prevent violence and harassment or refused to charge persons who commit such offenses.

Mobs occasionally attacked individuals accused of blasphemy, their family, or their religious community prior to their arrest. When blasphemy and other religious cases were brought to court, extremists often packed the courtroom and made public threats against an acquittal. Religious extremists continued to threaten to kill those acquitted of blasphemy charges. High-profile accused persons often went into hiding or emigrated after acquittal.

In October 2007 the National Engineering and Science Commission cancelled a fellowship awarded to Amna Zaheka upon learning that she was an Ahmadi. The public organization stated that she was not found suitable for employment based on the grounds that her religious beliefs could lead to her being a security risk.

Ahmadi individuals and institutions long have been victims of religious violence, much of it organized by religious extremists.

On June 5, 2008, the Principal of Punjab Medical College expelled 15 Ahmadi women students and 8 men students accused of preaching Ahmadiyyat in the university. On June 5, 2008, students went on strike, surrounded the principal's office, and demanded expulsion of all Ahmadi students. The principal held a session of the Disciplinary Committee and issued orders to expel 23 Ahmadi students. Four of the women students were in their final year of studies. At the end of the reporting period, the case was pending.

In April 2008 a large group of Islamic scholars held an international conference dealing with the question of the Ahmadi Muslims in Chichawatni. The participants demanded that all Ahmadis serving in the armed forces be discharged and that their property be confiscated by the Government.

In July 2007 Minhajul Quran Council, a Braelvi religio-educational organization, advertised in the press that it would hold a week long course on "Radd-e-Qadianiyat" (Rejection of the Ahmadi Faith) at Madrassah Daarul Ulema, Nuria Rizvi, in the Gulberg area of Faisalabad. The seminary also hired small vans that toured Faisalabad and other nearby towns and cities announcing this course. The course was held and its proceedings were published in local newspapers. The seminary used loudspeakers during the course, read material, delivered speeches against the Ahmadiyya group, and called for attendees to be aware of the "fallaciousness of the religious group."

Violence against and harassment of Christians continued during the period covered by this report.

In June 2008 a private school in Sialkot fired two Christian school teachers, Imran Masih and his spouse, for tearing an Islamic book. Masih was angered that one of his students was reading a religious book that contained Qur'anic verses and sayings of Prophet Muhammad about the 'Life after the Death' rather than reading his textbook. Masih allegedly ripped apart the book and threw it in the trash, offending Muslim students. Masih and his wife went into hiding to save their lives.

On April 2, 2008, a group of five men kidnapped, tortured, and forced Christians Anwar Masih and his wife Bushra to change their religious beliefs. The couple escaped after some days and went into hiding. Masih was acquitted in 2004 after being charged and imprisoned for 1 year on blasphemy charges.

In May 2008 three Muslims raped a Christian girl with mental disabilities in Lahore. Initially, the family of the girl did not file charges because of threats and pressure, but after receiving support from two Christian lawyers, they filed a case. The three suspects were arrested.

In May 2008 Muslim workers at an ammunition plant in Gunjwal kidnapped their Christian colleague, Danish Masih, after he condemned anti-Christian remarks and allegedly responded with blasphemous comments about [Islam](#). Masih, who worked as a welder, disappeared from the factory on May 15, 2008. According to Masih's family, tensions rose earlier when three Muslim co-workers made offensive remarks about [Christianity](#). He initially remained silent but then requested

that his Muslim co-workers refrain from religious discussions during work. The group reportedly became infuriated and shouted anti-Christian slogans. Within hours he disappeared.

On April 10, 2008, unidentified assailants killed a Christian, Javed Masih, in Okara. By the end of the reporting period, no one had been arrested. Masih was among one of the activists of the Landless Farmers movement on Military Farms, Okara. He was reportedly shot dead on his way back home.

On February 6, 2008, a Muslim mob used guns, axes, and sticks to attack Christians in Sabz-Kot, Punjab, allegedly after hearing announcements in mosques telling them to teach a lesson to Christians, who had warned a few Muslim youths to stop harassing girls after Sunday services. A group of three to five Muslims allegedly had previously verbally harassed and forcefully grabbed Christian girls in the open courtyard of a church, on their way home, causing unrest among village Christians.

According to *Compass Direct News*, on December 8, 2007, five extremists kidnapped Zahiruddin, a Christian, and his driver in Bannu. The men demanded that Zahiruddin renounce his religious beliefs at gunpoint; however, Zahiruddin refused to convert and was released on January 2, 2008.

In August 2007 Christian residents of Tailgodom, Sandagodom, and Goalgodom neighborhoods in the north received letters "inviting" them to abandon Christianity and join Islam or be killed. Residents of Peshawar also reported receiving letters threatening suicide bombings if they did not convert.

Hindus faced societal violence, often directed at their temples, during the period covered by this report. Criminals targeted Hindu businessmen for abductions, particularly in Karachi. Hindus claimed they were forced to pay ransom since police did little to recover victims of kidnapping. Societal violence was due in part to the nationalist bias against Indians and those perceived to be of Indian origin.

In April 2008 approximately 40 Hindu employees of a factory in Karachi were barred from entering their workplace after some members of the Hindu community tried to register a case regarding the killing of their colleague Jagdesh Kumar. The employees, all residents of Marwari Mohalla, were restricted from entering Nova Industries in the Korangi industrial area in Karachi by the factory's management.

Local tribesmen initially refused to grant permission to the Hindu community living in Kohat to perform the last rites of their dead. The Hindus had sought permission for cremating their dead in the mountains of Alizai area. On May 5, 2008, the nazim (mayor) of the union council inaugurated the place for cremating the bodies but local elders stopped the ceremony, saying that they would give permission after local level consultation. Cremations, although delayed, were later allowed upon notification to the union council nazim (mayor). No violence or social unrest was reported.

Societal violence against the Sikh community remained comparatively rare.

Ismailis reported that they were the objects of resentment of Sunni Muslims due to their comparative economic well-being. Ismailis reported they frequently faced societal pressure to adopt conservative Islamic practices or risk being ostracized socially.

In May 2008 students complained that some teachers and administrative officials at Punjab University have reportedly discriminated among students on religious and political grounds. Muhammad Ahsan, a student, allegedly complained that the pro-Islami Jamiat Talaba (IJT) hostel administration did not give him a room in the hostels because he was Shi'a. The university vice-chancellor received an application titled 'Kya Shi'a hona Jurm Hay' (Is being Shi'a a crime?) on May 16, 2008 from Ahsan requesting him to take note of the incident.

Anti-Semitic articles were occasionally in the vernacular press, although there are no known Jewish communities within the country.

Some Sunni Muslim groups published literature calling for violence against Ahmadis, Shi'a Muslims, other Sunni sects, and Hindus. Some newspapers frequently published articles that contained derogatory references to religious minorities, especially Ahmadis, Hindus, and Jews.

In July 2007 Pakistan Army and security forces launched a military operation against the Red Mosque (Lal Masjid) in Islamabad that resulted in the deaths of 10 security force members and approximately 79 militants, including the mosque's leader. From March through June 2007, militants who took over the mosque and its adjoining girls' madrassah kidnapped brothel owners, policemen, and foreign massage parlor workers. Fighting erupted when militants fired upon security forces attempting to cordon off the mosque. The confrontation prompted the Government to renew its efforts to curb the teaching of extremism in madrassahs across the country.

The Supreme Court ordered the mosque to be reopened in October 2007 and appointed new leadership. The Court also ordered the reconstruction of the madrassah on the original land and adjacent property would be used to construct an Islamic research center. The prayer leader at the time of the operation, Maulana Abdul Aziz, continued to appeal the cases against him as they relate to the Red Mosque incident. On July 6, a year after the events at the Red Mosque, a suicide bomb exploded at a marketplace in Islamabad killing 19 persons, including 14 police officers.

On June 17, 2008, four Shi'a Muslims were killed in Hangu, NWFP. Police did not confirm the attack was sectarian, but the town has had a history of violent clashes between the majority Sunni and minority Shi'a Muslims.

According to a BBC Report, on June 16, 2008, a bomb exploded outside a Shi'a mosque in Dera Ismail Khan killing four persons and injuring three others. The explosion occurred as worshippers were leaving after evening prayers.

On January 17, 2008, a suicide attack in a Shi'a mosque in Peshawar's Qissa Khawani Bazaar killed 10 persons and injured approximately 20 others. The attack took place on the seventh day of the holy month of Muharram. The bombing was motivated primarily by sectarian tension. Several small protests followed the explosion but concluded peacefully.

Since November 2007 multiple incidents of violence and death have been reported in Kurram Agency due to an on-going battle between Deobandis and Shi'as. Sunni militants deliberately exploited sectarian tensions, resulting in multiple deaths during the year.

Discrimination in employment based on religious affiliation appeared widespread. Christians had difficulty finding jobs other than those involving menial labor, although Christian activists stated that the situation had improved somewhat in the private sector in recent years.

Throughout the reporting period, attacks, threats, and violence by Islamic extremists increased across the country, but especially in the NWFP. The origin was perceived to be from the influence of the Taliban coming across the border from neighboring Afghanistan.

On June 29, 2008, Tehrik-i-Taliban posted notices on mosques throughout Kohat, NWFP asking persons to refrain from engaging in "un-Islamic" practices of listening to music, watching television, gambling, and shaving beards. The letter also stated that "schools and offices coordinating with NGOs or functioning under them are enemies of the Qur'an and Islam. They are preaching Christianity to destroy the believers. All the people are informed to avoid all such activities within a week or else action would be taken against them."

On June 25, 2008, militants reportedly seized a public girls' school and renamed it "Jamia Hafsa" after the girls' seminary, which was connected to Islamabad's Red Mosque. The militant leader warned that his group would convert other schools into religious seminaries in Bajaur, FATA.

On June 20, 2008, LI activists visited a shrine in Peshawar and warned persons to avoid taking part in religious ceremonies there.

On May 19, 2008, a bomb exploded outside a mosque in Khar killing three persons and injuring two others.

In January 2008 a Shi'a mosque in Peshawar received a threat warning of an attack if it did not cease operations.

On January 18, 2008, local security forces apprehended a man carrying a grenade at a checkpoint in Parachinar. Officials

stated that the man was on his way to attack a Muharram procession in the area.

On December 18, 2007, two explosions damaged Abdul Shakoor Baba's shrine in the Chamkani area.

On December 5, 2007, Shi'a religious leaders received letters threatening attacks unless they closed several religious sites and left Kohat. Some leaders were also threatened with death if they did not convert to the Sunni sect.

In October 2007 Christians in Swat reported that they were called and told to convert to Islam. The local Christian leaders complained to the police, but protection was not provided to the Christian community in the area. No arrests have been made, but the Government of Peshawar agreed to provide security protection to the community.

According to the *Daily Mashriq*, militants in September 2007 threatened to blow up a girls' school in the Sangota area if the school administration did not require the females to be properly covered at all times. After the threats became stronger, the district school board ordered all females, whether Muslim or not, to wear the proper attire and to observe "hijab."

On September 15, 2007, an explosion damaged the John Basco Catholic School in Bannu. No injuries were reported. The school's student population is comprised of an equal number of Muslim and Christian students who are taught by teachers affiliated with both religious groups. The school's administrators refused to close the school following the explosion.

In August 2007 Christian and Hindu groups in Peshawar received threatening letters from militants demanding that they convert to Islam or face suicide attacks. The authors of the letter identified themselves as belonging to an organization called al-Jihad. Similar threats were sent to the Christian community in Charsadda. Police responded by tightening security measures around places of worship and residences of Christians and Hindus.

Throughout the reporting period, Islamic extremists attacked shops in the NWFP and FATA that sold local and foreign music and video cassettes. Shop owners were warned prior to attacks to stop selling items considered to be un-Islamic. In at least one case, Muslim clerics were arrested for an attack.

In June 2008 four bomb blasts destroyed seven shops in Kohat, NWFP. The blasts also partially damaged a rural health center.

In April 2008, a remote controlled explosive device destroyed a video shop in the Karak District, NWFP. Local police registered a case against the unknown assailants, but no arrests were made.

In April 2008 militants damaged seven classrooms at a girls' school in Dara Adam Khel using an explosive device. A case was registered against the unknown assailants, but no arrests were made.

In January 2008 two music shops in the Afridiabad area of Peshawar were blown up. Police registered cases against the unknown assailants but with no arrests made.

In February 2007 two public high schools for girls in the NWFP received threats of attack unless its female students and teachers began wearing veils and burqas. *AsiaNews* reported that Islamic extremists gave the schools 1 week to conform with "Islamic norms" or they would be bombed. Both schools were closed but were re-opened later on with increased security.

Positive actions took place between different religious groups. These steps increased tolerance and promoted religious freedom.

In April 2008 the local Taliban, religious scholars, and tribal elders secured the release of two Sikh community members who were kidnapped from Dowaba area in the Hangu District. The joint Jirga members took Attar Singh and Sehra Singh to their homes after winning their release from their captors. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Ulema Council took nine kidnappers into their custody and decided to publicly hang

them to discourage crimes in the area.

According to *Compass Direct News*, in October 2007 Muslims apologized for attacking a church and declaring religious war against Christians from mosque minarets. On October 10, three hundred Punjabi Muslim villagers vandalized the New Apostolic Church. The mob broke church windows, threw dung on its walls, and cut wires to the church's loudspeaker. Muslim clerics called for jihad, Islamic holy war, against the Christian "infidels." Threats included demands for Christians to convert to Islam and boycotting Christians. The Muslims apologized for hurting religious sentiments and promised not to misuse the loudspeakers. No charges were brought against the villagers who attacked the church, instituted the boycott, and called for holy war against the Christians.

According to *Compass Direct News*, in July 2007 Muslims apologized for attacking a church in June in the Punjab region, but offered no compensation for injuring Christians and damaging the building. In addition to injuring seven Christians and destroying books at the Salvation Army church, the perpetrators admitted that a Muslim resident had planned to burn a page of the Qur'an and blame the Christian community. The legal representative for the Christian community stated that the Christians forgave the Muslims. Both parties dropped court cases in which they accused each other of instigating violence.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officers maintained a dialogue with government, religious, and minority community representatives to encourage religious freedom and discuss the blasphemy laws, the Hudood Ordinance, curriculum reform in the public education and madrassah education systems, treatment of the Ahmadiyya and Christian communities, and sectarian violence. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, met with leaders from communities of all religious groups and NGOs working on religious freedom problems. Embassy officials also raised and discussed treatment of the Ahmadis with parliamentarians.

As part of its overall public education reform program, valued at \$100 million (6 billion rupees), the U.S. Government provided substantial financial support to the Government's curriculum reform initiative, which included eliminating the teaching of religious intolerance.

Released on September 19, 2008

[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](#)



Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.